

Appleby Again

R Dwarkadas

DEAN PAUL APPLEBY, after three successive visits to India, is surely no novice on the subject of Indian Public Administration. He brings to bear on our problems the dispassionateness and impartiality of an outside observer. His technical competence, academic bent of mind and experience as a Director of the Bureau of Budget of New York State, make him eminently qualified to pass judgments on our administrative problems. Appleby is not one those Americans who either doubts the democratic character of our government or questions the necessity of our planning for economic development. As a matter of fact, he commends our Plans: "The two Five Year Plans have been brilliantly conceived in their analyses of needs and their balancing of values". If he has to say something harsh about our administrative machinery and methods, it is only to highlight, the difficulties rather than from "American arrogance", as some of our parliamentarians thought mistakenly.

Frankly, some of the criticisms of the parliamentarians show either a lack of understanding of the problems of our administration or are motivated by extraneous political considerations. For too long we have been *fed* on illusions and myths; it is time we rationalized less and came to grips with facts. It is really hard for those who have been in the habit of making sweeping criticism, to appreciate the nuances and methods of administrative improvement. Besides, it is so easy to use the expert's strictures for partisan purposes; but, obviously, it needs an open mind, to be able to brush aside political affiliations and get down to the task of cleansing our administration and making it into a dynamic organization, suited to the requirements of speedy development,

Publicity and Terminology

It is unfortunate that Appleby should have said that his criticisms ought not to be made and and discussed publicly. This makes mystery out of an administration. The tendency of administrators to keep everything confidential and their allergy to publicity have contributed not a little to the prevalence

of misconceptions in the public mind about administration. It is prudent not to be so secretive, particularly when the rank and file ought also to be conversant with the administrative system for its effective functioning.

We do not seem to have as yet recognized the value of terminology in public administration. Words like 'centralization' and 'decentralization', 'start and line', 'companies and corporations' are not properly understood in terms of their local application. This calls for careful attempt at clarification of terminological usages.

Volte Face

Appleby discusses at length the concept of autonomy of nationalized ventures. In his first report, he emphasised the governmental character of public enterprises rather than their autonomy. It is refreshing to note that he now concedes that "advocacy of autonomy simply highlights the need to educate responsible top organs of government in the ordinances of self-denial which would restrict their intervention to really important concerns". Appleby also makes a volte face when he says that "There is no danger whatever that grants or power to Indian enterprises will be too great, ...the danger is that the government and parliament will be much too fearful and will grant insufficient 'autonomy.'"

It is agreed on all hands that autonomy of public enterprises is destroyed if there is too much control over the day-to-day affairs of administration by Ministers a ml or Parliament, but to draw the line where control should *end* is indeed very difficult. Post-war experience in Britain shows that, ministers issue directives to public corporations for the purposes of policy-coordination. However, there is a difference between ministerial action for a coordinating policy and ministerial interference affecting; the flexibility of public corporations. Dr John Matthai's resignation from the Chairmanship of the State Bank has highlighted the danger in ministers getting bogged down in details of administration of public corporations. Besides, an inquisitorial parliament may make public corporations more cautious and less action-minded.

The qualities that ought to be stimulated in public corporations are initiative, drive and enthusiasm for action, rather than caution, circumspection and fear, which frustrate action. It is possible to devise methods and patterns of restraints whereby freedom of action is carefully blended with responsibility to democratic agencies. By and large, the considerations of greater delegation of responsibility, rapid decision-making and rapid action buttress the arguments in favour of strengthening the autonomy of public corporations. Perhaps, there is a clear case for a deeper examination of the questions involved in the accountability of nationalized industries and it may well be examined by a small expert commission.

Need for more Government

Appleby strikes at the heart of our problem when he says that while thinking is big about social objectives, the thinking is small about the government whose increasing size and complexity is the sine qua non for the translation of social objectives. He highlights this aspect in these impressive words; 'What India needs more than anything else, what Parliament needs most, is more government by joint secretaries, more government by deputy secretaries, more government by under secretaries, more government by managing directors and their subordinates',

Decision-making' and Delegation

Great social objectives imply more government, more government implies widening and deepening of hierarchy and proliferation of hierarchy implies delegation of responsibility. Appleby rebuts the view that greater delegation results in erosion of responsibility. Far from eroding responsibility, greater delegation strengthens it. It is not delegation, moreover, which will endanger the realization of public purposes, but small thinking, perfunctory application, concern for precedent, rupee-pinching, etc, which will most positively thwart public good.

High authorities, if they mean to function effectively, ought, to concern themselves more and more with higher policy decisions. They have to achieve a 'new intellectual orientation' which will keep them tied to higher policy concerns of government, instead of frustrating their

effectiveness and utility by getting tangled in details of routine. Basically, there are levels of authority which ought to be matched with levels of responsibility. If each level keeps itself to its tasks, and respects the delegated pattern of governmental functioning, you get the government most suited to the complexities of modern age; but, if there is constant blurring and trenching of responsibility by incursion's, specially from the top, there will be corrosion of responsibility with its concomitant, timidity of junior officials, who will shun taking decisions, which ought to be legitimately taken by them. This leads to the tendency of pushing smaller decisions to higher elevations of authority, with consequent danger of congestion of petty embroilments at higher levels. This not only destroys the capacity to take decisions at lower levels but also destroys the outlook of 'bigness' at higher levels. By not delegating responsibility, the higher levels get stunted and stymied by routine irrelevancies which leave little time to executives for larger concerns and policy issues. In other words, the conditions for effective decision-making at all levels, and the fruitfulness of delegation of responsibility, have to be clearly comprehended by administrators and politicians for ensuring success of the nation's developmental plans.

Performance of Parliament

These are some of the considerations which are at the back of his mind when Appleby indicts Parliamentary performance. He accepts the representative, policy-sanctioning role of Parliament. As a matter of fact, he, admires the debates on policy matters concerning legislative proposals. As for the performance of Parliament in relation to administration, he perceives a "negative approach". He says, "over and over again, cases of parliamentary criticism of small decisions made a year or two or three previously are used to explain the impossibility of taking expeditious action". Considering Parliament rightly as high-level, political representative policy-sanctioning agency, he thinks that it ought to concern itself more and more to the manner and direction of action rather than with control of specific actions. He notes that there is a baseless fear that parliamentary responsibility is being undermined. Authorities, usually in their zest for expansion, transcend the limits of their capacities and

concerns. This gets Parliament bogged down in details and particular actions.

There are other failings of Parliament also which need special mention:

(a) Parliament ought to give more attention to the development of good budgeting.

(b) Government proposals are too often and too rigorously examined and amended,

(c) Parliament's chief competitors are the States and not the Central Secretariat of which it always make? a bogey.

(d) It relies too much on the judgment of businessmen. "The business world is far from an Ideal place from which to derive administrators of public enterprises". Parliament is too ready to *concede* the interests of narrow, small but influential business interests. This charge is pretty serious, coming as it does from an American!

(e) Parliament endorses the small and narrow approach of Public Service Commission, undermining thereby the responsibility of ministries. It ought to be developmental in its outlook in regard to personnel. Interference with or criticism of particular actions is not the mission of Parliament.

Positive Responsibility

The agitational role of Parliament pales into insignificance before the constructive, positive responsibility for large-scale operation of a dynamic government. There is, unfortunately, a growing volume of evidence to the effect that legislators trespass the boundaries of discretion, confuse and disturb the effectiveness of official decision-making and action, drive a wedge in the chain of administrative responsibility, invoke through partisan devices ministerial interventions which tend to destroy morale and promote partisan individual and business interests, even at times to the detriment of public welfare. In an earlier report Goralwala had made many references to glaring damaging cases of legislative and ministerial incursions in the Civil Service's sphere of discretion. The prejudices of the legislature against the Civil Services are well-known. It is time Parliament acted up to the advice of Appleby: "The simple way in which Parliament could reverse its Influence on administration from a negative one to a

positive one would be for it to stop looking for things to criticise and to begin looking for things to praise". Parliament has to learn much on Administration for the success of the nation's developmental plans. It must cease limiting the Civil Servants to the confines of 'rigid processes of colonial administration' and help make them creative tools of a developmental State.

The Role of Audit

By far the most important and severe of Appleby's criticisms is against Parliament's predilections to exaggerate the importance of the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General. Audit authorities in many parts of the world tend to arrogate to themselves powers which ought not to belong to them. Audit functions, more often than not, as if it were an end in itself. Audit is a means to good administration; it ought not to hamper the end product of administration, viz action.

Audit may be defined as "an examination made on behalf of a Principal of the transactions of an agent as recorded in an account". In this case, the principal is Parliament. Audit gives to parliamentarians a comforting and illusory sense of security. The scope of audit review shows a steady tendency to widen. Audit tends to substitute its determinations for those of operating officials on questions of fact as well as of law, involved in rulings on the availability of appropriations. The direct consequence of these tendencies is to draw attention to arguments over jurisdiction and to paper work about details handled at a point too remote from their programmatic origins, to the detriment of good management. It is not in India alone that audit tends to extend its scope unduly. An American expert, Mr Mansfield, writing on the powers of the Comptroller General of U S says: "the Comptroller-General's independence left a good deal of room within the Interstices of the law for the expression of views on public policy to social and economic fields. Such expressions did not necessarily coincide with prevailing attitudes to either the executive or the legislative branch". Mansfield, Harvey, C—The Comptroller General, Yale University Press, 1939. That is exactly what Appleby means when he says dramatically that. "Into the vacuum thus left, the auditor has moved".

Apart from repressive and negative influences of Audit which are roundly condemned, the Comptroller and Auditor General's right to review administrative decisions is challenged. Appleby questions the competence of Auditor-General to appraise objectives and performance of administrators. "What is Cabinet for, what is Prime Minister for, what is parliament for, what are the individual ministers for, what is a Secretariat for, and what is a bureaucracy for?". It has also to be noted, however, that nowhere has Appleby taken exception to the normal functions of the Comptroller General, as 'watch-dog' of public revenues.

Rights of Personnel

A damaging concern for the 'rights' of personnel, the cadre and rank consciousness, the negative outlook of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Public Service Commission's stringent procedures all these hamper the development of an Imaginative personnel policy. The expert is all in favour of keeping 'large registers of eligibles rather than follow the tedious procedure of special examination, advertisement and selection. In the words of Appleby, the "present practice imposed on Home Affairs and Public Service Commission have made for pettiness, unimaginativeness and inflexibility and a tempo in which a calendar has more relevance than a clock". There are not many persons capable of serving well at high levels: they must be sought wherever they may be found, in business or Universities or in Government. As for salaries, he feels there is too much of rupee-pinching, and that it is time that the people as well as Parliament realised that they must be willing to pay for an adequate and successful government, without wasting their time searching for small economies, mulcted out of the not-very-high salary earners.

Planning Commission

Appleby has a good word for the Planning Commission. Planning is recognised in our system as an essential part of administrative policy-making, not one which functions in a political or administrative 'vacuum'. He commends the idea of making members of the Commission as a "small edition of the Government itself". This makes the plan co-extensive with the develop-

ment of policy and programme of the government. That the Planning Commission has not assumed direct responsibility in the execution of the Plan, and it is constantly endeavouring to evaluate the performance of the plan, all point in the right direction. Thus, the recent elevation of the Community Projects Administration into a ministry is a move in the right direction. The location of Public Management Studies in the Planning Commission, however, is questioned by Appleby and the Cabinet Secretariat is suggested as a good choice.

He feels, and that rightly, that programme agencies should come into their own, and rely less on the Ministries of Finance and Home Affairs. The review agencies have functioned stringently, and this is stifling the creativeness of programme agencies. The ministries of Finance and Home ought to move steadily to higher levels of responsibility, exercising more general, and less specific, controls, allowing programme agencies to build internal competence in management and financial programming. The system of having a financial adviser in programmatic ministry is undermining departmental responsibilities.

Business Management

Appleby recommends an office for Business Management in every Ministry, and in every attached operating administration, to develop and maintain accounts necessary for administrative control, formulate budget estimates, project forward expenditures, keep expenditures within the limits of appropriations, see whether the plan objectives are realised, supervise planning of personnel, its recruitment, placement and promotion, study and propose procedure and structural changes, etc. There seems to be a careless blend of control and O & M functions charged to this business management office. Whereas there is a clear need for devices for internal control, within a department it does not appear expedient to mix O & M functions with control functions. O & M functions, i.e., matters like structural and procedural analyses, office machines, review of methods and practices, etc. ought to be in charge of an O & M Division, located in each Department. This might fall on expert help from the Central O & M division located in the Central Cabinet Secretariat. To mix

advisory, staff functions on the one hand, with that of budgetary, personnel control apparatus of the Department would be derogatory to the effectiveness of O & M agencies, which must always remain consultative. I hope Appleby will give this suggestion a thought.

Programme Expediter

His other suggestion for a top level Programme Expediter or Plan Expediter sounds good, though ambitious. The expediter is to serve as an 'Umpire' trouble-shooter, bottleneck breaker, procedure reformer and structural adviser. In other words, he must be a top level, Cabinet supported, grand coordinator, umpire, O & M expert, Development enthusiast, all rolled into one. A development enthusiast must be one with a streak of aggression about him. An umpire should have the sobriety and impartiality of a judge. An O & M expert ought to be a statesmanlike consultant. Can all these qualities be found in one single person? If one could find one such person, this suggestion ought not to be lightly treated. There is another valuable recommendation to accelerate decision-making in the Ministry of Finance, it is good to have a special aide to the Secretary in charge of expenditure.

Appleby's suggestions, on the whole, are in the direction of elevating concerns of policy-making bodies, and cutting through the maze of reference-cross-reference and detailed-review-pattern of administration. He wants to strengthen departmental integrity and responsibility and recognises the necessity of expanding hierarchy. Enlarged delegation of responsibility and permeating the whole administrative mechanism with what he called as "action-mindedness" are his recipe for success in developmental administration.

These are the suggestions, which are most controversial. There are many others which are no less sound and no less worthy of immediate implementation. Undoubtedly, Appleby has done a very good job this time. If he, has enraged Parliament and the Comptroller General, that is not his fault. He has thrown searching light on what has been ignored so long. Instead of being sore at his remarks, it would be prudent on our part to set to work on cleansing the Augean stables.

*“ Where now the city stands,
there was once naught but the city’s site. ” OVID*

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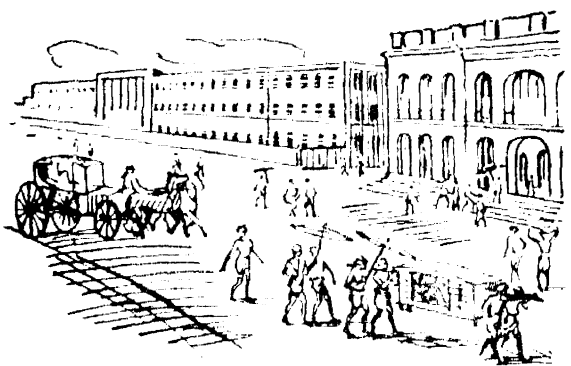
On August 24

1690, when Job Charnock stood on the banks of the Hooghly, he saw before him a depressing landscape of mud hovels, swamps, and paddy fields.

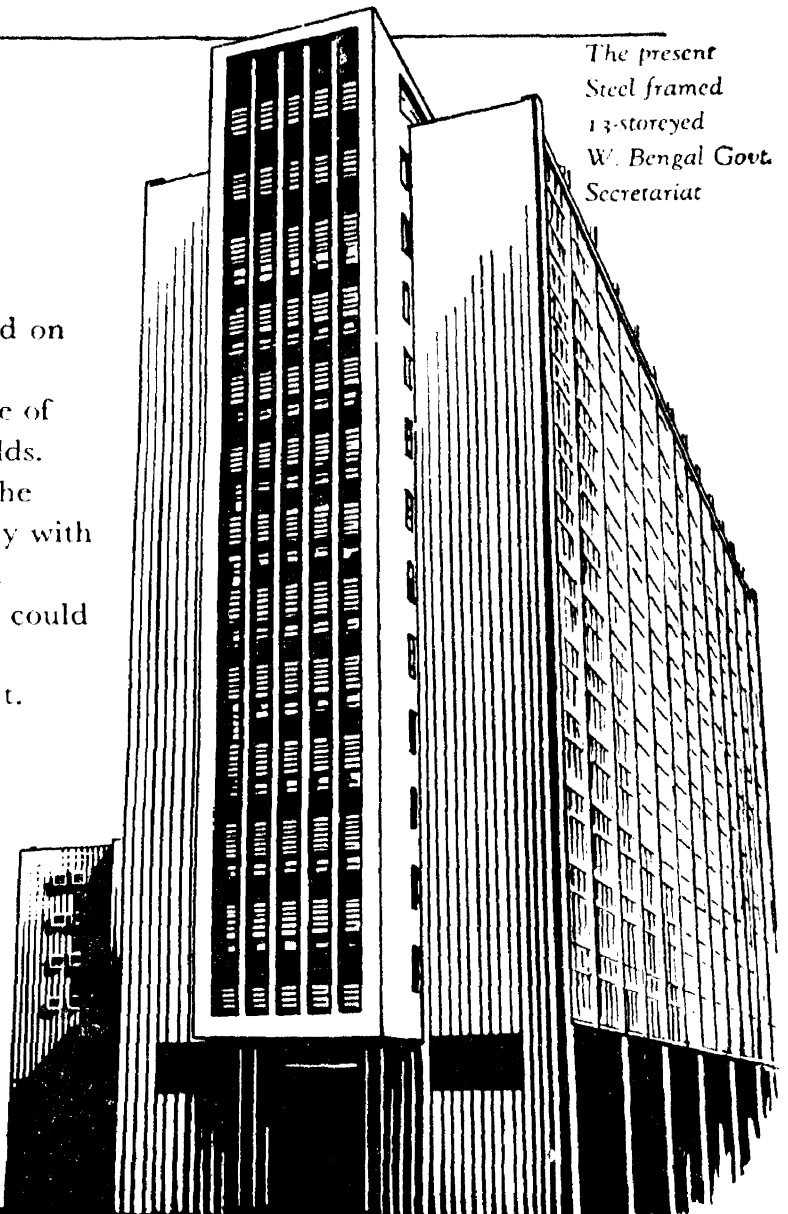
On that very site has risen in the course of the years a pulsating city with heavy industry, modern transport and

busy docks—a metropolis which could have made little progress but for STEEL—thousands of tons of it.

*The present
Steel framed
13-storeyed
W. Bengal Govt.
Secretariat*



Scene before the old Secretariat—18th century



Steel

For

Progress

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STEEL

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